

## A fish (*ika*) tablet with hieroglyphic writing from Isla de Pascua discovered in Madrid

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Several years ago a member of the Chilean Embassy staff in Spain contacted an individual who possessed a small collection of wood carvings from Easter Island. Among these was a fish-shaped tablet whose history follows.

The tablet belonged to Chilean President Arturo Alessandri Palma (1868-1950), who gave it to the present owners. They live now in Madrid and, thanks to their valuable collaboration, I was able to obtain photographs and tracings of the

g) (Figure 2) and with those of the fish tablet of Brussels (Dederen, No. R, and Fischer, T5), also with the small glyphs from the basalt stone of Gair, from the Tomenika writing and the manuscripts of Atan, Haoa and Heriveri. It shows that the "*ika*" tablet, (Figure 3) called the Madrid tablet for having been found in that city, has some traces of writing similar in form to those of the fish tablet from Tahiti and of course are much better made than those shown in the fish tablet from Brussels.

Various investigators were consulted on the subject matter of the tablet since the presence of a glyph with the form of a four-legged animal (in the Tahitian tablet and in the manuscripts of Atan, Haoa and Heriveri these appear in vertical position and are representations of a rat, called *kio'e*), cause me to suppose that this animal was the protagonist of the text of the tablet as it eats the sugar cane (*kihi*) and other plants. Dr. Irina Fedorova recently translated the *rongorongo* tablets in the Museum of St. Petersburg and has published a book, *Doshchechki kokhau rongorongo iz kunstkamery* (1995), providing the basis for the translation of *rongorongo* writing in Easter Island. However, she does not include the

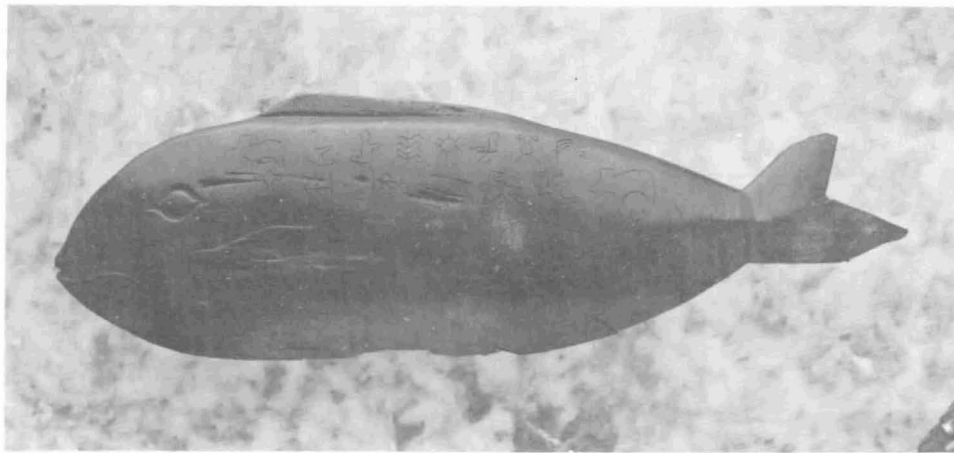


Figure 1: The "*Ika*" tablet of Madrid. As can be seen in the photograph, the tablet is of dark wood and shaped in the form of a fish. The features are shown on each side with an eye, mouth and dorsal fin. The tail is cut at an angle. Various hieroglyphic signs corresponding to *rongorongo* writing are incised on both sides; these are of the type known as *ta'u*.

tablet and its dimensions.

As can be appreciated in Figure 1, the tablet is of dark wood, is in the form of a fish (*ika*), with conspicuous carvings for the eyes, mouth and dorsal fin, and with a tail cut at an angle.

On both sides of the fish are seen various incised hieroglyphic signs corresponding to *rongorongo* writing that is more like the type "*ta'u*" than the writing known as Classic. According to the classification by Fischer (1993) its record is:

Unknown wood, Ta'u writing, not boustrophedon. Dimensions: 39.3 x 12.3 x 1.8 cm, 7 lines (4 in face A and 3 in face B), with 48 glyphs (27 and 21 respectively). Possibly made at the beginning of this century, around 1920. Private Collection.

This tablet has been compared with glyphs on the "*ika*" tablet of Tahiti (Dederen 1981: No. M; and Fisher 1993: RR



Figure 2: The Tahiti "*Ika*" tablet.

word *kio'e* in the translation of the tablet's text.

For the interest of students of Rapanui writing, the complete translation made by Dr. Fedorova of the Madrid fish tablet follows on the following pages.

Text of the Madrid fish tablet "ika" translated by Dr. Irina Fedorova.

380	274	420/430		031/035
	nga/tonga	moa		kihi
[He] cut	[He] gathered	[yam] moa <moa>,	[sugar cane]	kihi
008	044		090 +	
hetu/ketu	aka		riki	
[He] dug	a root		small/ariki (a chief)	
+008	031/035	V270		077+
hetu/ketu	kihi	(k)o		aka
[He] dug	[sugar cane] kihi,			a root
+000	003			600
ta	kihi			taha
[He] cut	[sugar cane] kihi,			[yam] taha
V2751	380=270			774
nga	(k)o			nehe
[He] cut	[sugar cane] kihi			[yam] nehe
2751	V634	000		044+634/700
nga	taha	ta		aka taha ika
[He] cut	[yam] taha,	[he] cut	a root [of]	taha/a plant
000	044		002	053
ta	aka		rapa	tai
[He] cut	a root		[of taro] rapa	[and] tai
400			?	
turi			?	
[a sugar cane] turi			?	
275 1			V600	V634
nga/tonga			taha	taha
[He] cut [He] gathered			[yam] taha,	taha;
000	V003		021	004
ta	kihi		pu	ko
	057		031/035	
	?		kihi	
	(a plant),		[a sugar cane] kihi	

V695 nga	031/035 kihi		380	031/035 kihi
[He] cut	[a sugar cane] kihi,			[a sugar cane] kihi
031/035 kihi	260/220		260/220	031/035 kihi
[a sugar cane] kihi				[a sugar cane] kihi
	400 turi		400 turi	
[and sugar cane]	turi,		turi	
275 nga=	295 =nga	V400 turi	031/035 kihi	031/035 kihi
[He] cut	[sugar canes] turi	[and]	kihi,	kihi

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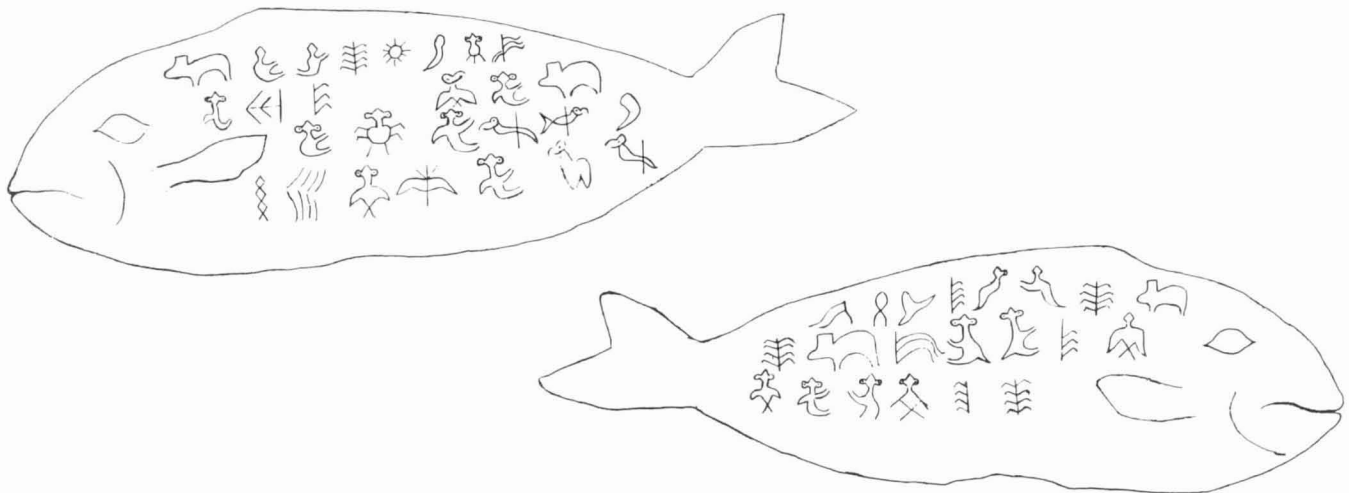


Figure 3: Line drawing of the Madrid fish tablet showing details of the rongorongo glyphs on each side.